

# Just for Parents

## If your teen is a victim of crime...

Teens are very vulnerable to crime and, unfortunately, become victims of crime more than any other age group. They experience all the same crimes that adults do—from robbery, sexual assault, and car theft to relationship violence, assaults, and bullying. How you—and other adults—respond can make a big difference in how your child copes with and recovers from the event.

Trauma and victimization affect people in different ways, but there are some behaviors to look for with your teen. Some common reactions to experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event include:

- Change in eating or sleeping habits
- Acting out: aggressive or inappropriate behavior
- Attention seeking behavior
- Increased risk taking
- Deteriorating school performance
- Fear of attending school
- Poor peer relations, withdrawal
- Physical signs of stress: headache, stomachache
- Nightmares
- Anger
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Loss of control or powerlessness
- Concentration difficulties
- Clinginess
- Mood swings

- Depression
- Anxiety

Rapid behavior changes can also be indicators of victimization and trauma. For example: a child who was always deeply concerned about looks and appearance, who stops being interested in how people view her; a strong student who no longer is interested in achievement; or a child who now expresses fear about doing something, such as taking the bus, attending school, or going somewhere frequented in the past.

Although keeping a child's victimization quiet or trying to forget about it can be an instinctive response, a victim has little chance of healing from the experience if they want to talk about it with someone, but can't. Forcing a person to suppress feelings and memories can damage a person's emotional, psychological, and even physical health.

## Things that can help:

- Remain calm in front of your teen.
- Remember that your teen will be aware of and affected by your reactions.
- Focus on what your teen needs.
- Avoid being judgmental. Everyone makes mistakes. Everyone makes bad decisions. This NEVER means it's ok for one person to harm another.
- Just listen—let your child vent and don't try to have answers for everything.



